

# nature net

The Nature Kenya Newsletter [www.naturekenya.org](http://www.naturekenya.org)

March 2002

## NATURALISTS CORNER



### She Sees with Sound

by Dino Martins

A dying hint of dusk clings to the fragments of the western horizon. The sky above is a heavy, smothering pall of thick, pregnant cloud. No hint of moonlight, not even the faint twinkle of a long-extinct star. The African night dissolves the periphery of my senses into a monochromatic texture of sooty, all-swallowing blue-black. But even without the slightest hint of light, life is busy thriving all around me.

As I stumble down the crumbling path, gripping the torch whose beam is my life-line, I am amazed at the complexity and variety of life all around. Evident only from shrill squeaks and promising rustles, innumerable rodents, frogs and insects forage diligently amongst the crevassed rocks and clumped grasses. Slugs and earthworms, glistening with slimy mucus, writhe across the path. Long-legged, long-feelered ants scurry about hungrily. A soft shuffle in the tortured tangle of a fig-tree makes me look up.

A pained, indignant look meets my torch beam. It is an African Born Owl.

*continued on page 4*

### Tiny organisms with a huge importance to biodiversity conservation

TALK BY JOYCE JEFWA

Monday 11 March '02,  
5:30 p.m. FORD HALL,

National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi,  
Refreshments prior & Town drop off

Fungi are little understood and often overlooked, but they are the most diverse group of organisms after insects and provide innumerable services.

The success of plant conservation, management of greenhouse gases, promotion of food security, the discovery of new pharmaceuticals and other products directly depend on fungi.

An illustrated talk - not to be missed!

### LIFE SENSE

#### *Our lives through animal eyes*

We will screen the third programme of this BBC production, before the talk on Fungi from 5:00 p.m. at the Ford Hall

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS

Friends of Nairobi Arboretum

Saturday 16 March '02,  
11:00 a.m. Shelter Banda

Nairobi Arboretum  
Snacks & refreshments to be served

Nature Kenya

Monday 13 May '02,  
5:30 p.m. Louis Leakey HALL,  
National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi

## GREAT NEW BOOK!!



THE NEW GUIDE TO  
**Trees & Shrubs**  
of East Africa  
by Najma Dharani

Will be available from Nature Kenya in March

A field guide to more than 330 of the trees, shrubs, palms and mangroves - indigenous, and exotic - commonly found in the East African region.

Softback. Approx 316 pages  
ISBN: 1-86872-640-1  
full colour with 760 photographs and illustrations showing each species, its fruit, flowers and special features.

## TRAINING FUNDAMENTALS OF ORNITHOLOGY

A CERTIFICATE COURSE FOR BIRD GUIDES AND BIRDERS  
ELSAMERE FIELD STUDIES CENTRE,  
LAKE NAIVASHA 23 - 30 APRIL 2002

### Fees and applications

KSh 23,500/= per person, payable to 'Nature Kenya'. Includes seven nights full-board accommodation, transport and all other course materials, fees, equipment, and teaching expenses.

Applicants must have birdwatching experience, and education up to at least KCSE level (CV required). **18 places** only and to secure a place, applications must be accompanied by a non-refundable deposit of KSh 11,750. Course fees must be paid in full by 16 April.

Applications should be addressed to: Lawrence Moino, Nature Kenya or e-mail [office@naturekenya.org](mailto:office@naturekenya.org)

## Action for Biodiversity Conservation

NATURE KENYA, P. O. Box 44486, 00100 GPO Nairobi Tel: 749957 / 746090 Fax: 741049 E-mail: [office@naturekenya.org](mailto:office@naturekenya.org)

# CONSERVATION ACTION

## SOUTH NANDI FOREST

Nandi District, alt. 1,700-1,850 m; major catchment for Nzoia R. & Yala R. & Lake Victoria Basin

Area: 19,502.2 ha; partly plantation, mostly indigenous forest

Vegetation: Tropical rain forest, with less diversity than Kakamega because of rather high altitude. Transitional between lowland forests of Central Africa and montane forests of Kenya highlands.

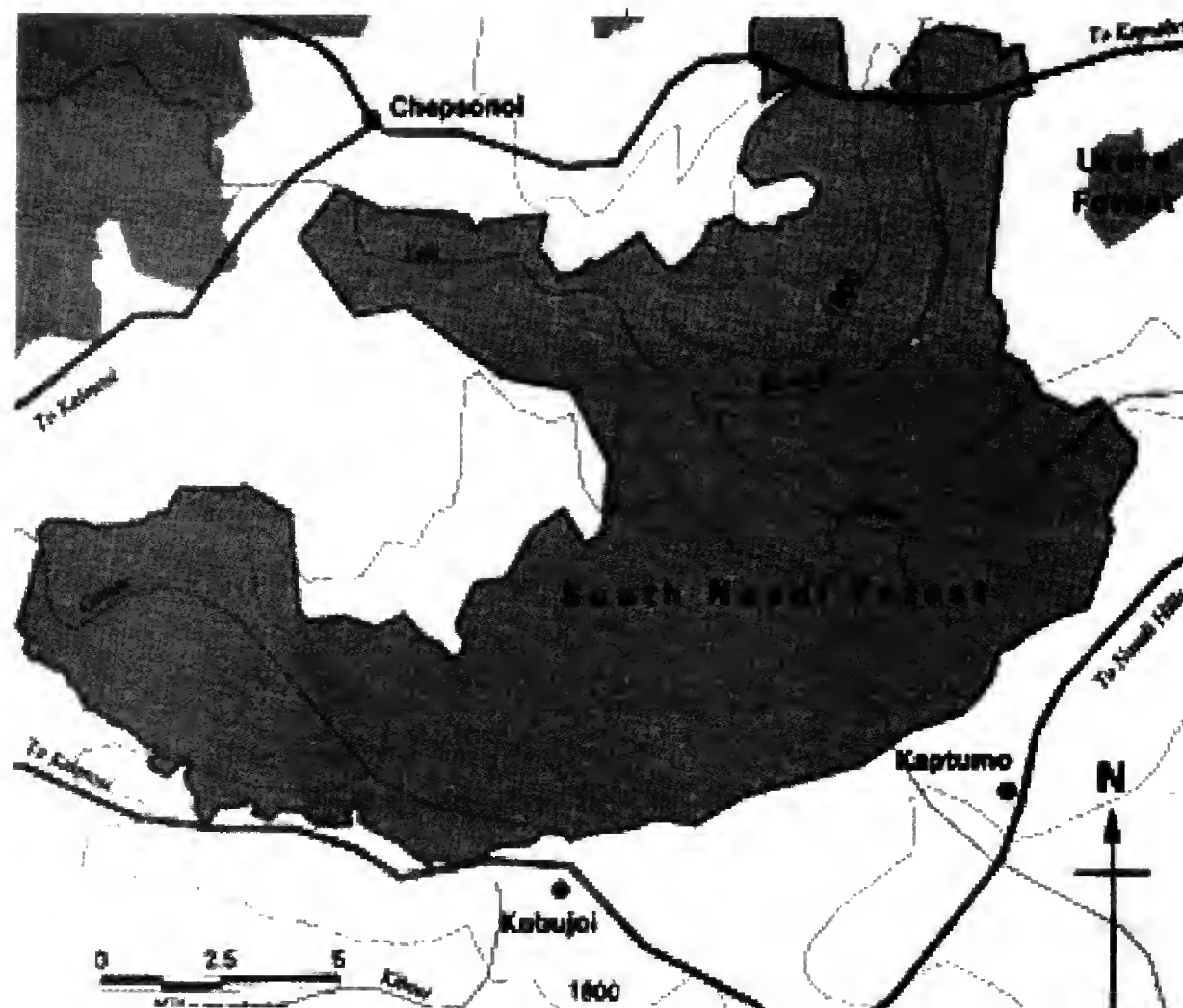
Birds: A recorded 111 species. Of these 47 are birds that depend on forests for survival. Holds two-thirds (29/43) of the Kenyan species characteristic of the Guinea-Congo Forest biomes.

Other wildlife: low numbers of threatened mammal species: Leopard *Panthera pardus* and Giant Forest Hog *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*. The Bongo *Tragelaphus euryceros* is reported to occur but there are no confirmed records.

South Nandi is one of the most threatened forests in Kenya. It is a gazetted forest reserve, but is much disturbed and depleted. Substantial parts of S. Nandi have been excised and given out to settlement and clear-felled to create the Nyayo Tea Zone.

Heavy, poorly managed logging has been intensive since the early 1990s. The felling targets valuable timber (*Prunus africana*, *Olea capensis* and *Ekebergia capensis*) as well as lighter wood like the *Croton megalocarpus* & *C. macrostachys*. The small endangered bird Turner's Eremomela shows a particular preference for these lighter trees for foraging.

Illegal encroachment has meant the clearing of forest undergrowth, charcoal burning, tree poaching and livestock grazing. Although only 35 ha of S. Nandi were excised last year, the publicity generated has encouraged people to encroach.



Nature Kenya's conservation programme is currently working with a local community group, South Nandi Biodiversity Conservation Group (SONABIC). With the help of a field intern, Nature Kenya is trying to assist this group to become a Site Support Group, able to stimulate the local community to take action for biodiversity conservation. This will be done through education and awareness programmes and the creation of small-scale nature based enterprises like beekeeping, sericulture and on farm forestry.

SONABIC have already drafted a funding proposal to carry out these activities and Nature Kenya, on its part, is looking for potential donors to support this initiative.

Already, good links with other community-based organisations have been created locally, and the Forest Department have kindly provided office space for the Nature Kenya field intern. Nature Kenya will build on these local networks to help conserve this threatened, important biodiversity area.

Reference: Beentje, H. Forests of Kenya, 1990 Proceedings of the Twelfth Plenary Meeting of aetfat, Hamburg 1990 &

Leon Bennun and Peter Njoroge, 1999 Important Bird Areas in Kenya



**729** Kenyan Total

**Bird Species Seen at World Birdwatch '2001**

October 6 & 7 2001

Congratulations to the 300 participants for this great total!

The three teams who recorded the highest number of species per Quarter Square Degree:

**1ST Arabuko Sokoke 73%/ 379 birds**

**2ND Marich Pass 58%/ 138 birds**

**3ND Jane Barnley's 50%/ 252 birds**

Special thanks to Sarova Hotels for their kind donation of the first prize of two nights for six at Sarova Shaba.



60 teams covered over 69 Quarter Square Degrees countrywide, including thirty Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Seven out of the nine Kenyan endemic species were recorded. Participants included school parties, IBA site support groups and tour guides.

**Thanks to all who supported this international event.**

**See you in 2003!**

# REGULAR ACTIVITIES

## BIRD RINGING

Meet at the Museum, Nairobi Botanic Garden, at 7:00 a.m. every Thursday.

## SUNDAY BIRDWATCH

Members meet at the National Museum, Nairobi, car park at 9:00 a.m. the third Sunday of every month, i.e. **17 March**. The members decide where to go. Bring lunch

## TREE WALK

Guided Tree Walks in the Arboretum on the last Monday, i.e. **25 March from 9:30 a.m.** Meet at the FONA offices beside the Girl Guides HQ. *Those who are not members of FONA or Nature Kenya pay Ksh 100/- fee on arrival at the gate.*

## WEDNESDAY MORNING BIRDCALLS

Bird watching walks at sites in and around Nairobi, Meet at the National Museum car park every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Return about 12:30 p.m. *Those who are not members can get temporary membership at Ksh 100 per birdwalk, payable on arrival at the car park.*

## ARABUKO-SOKOKE (COAST)

The Saturday birdwatch with the Arabuko Sokoke Forest Guides Association is on the first Saturday of each month i.e. **2 March, at 6:30 a.m.** from the Visitor Centre, Gede. Cost 100/- per person.

## FFJ Bird Walk (Coast)

Friends of Fort Jesus birdwalks are held the third Saturday of each month i.e. **16 March, at 4:00 p.m.** from Ratna Square, Nyalı

## DECLARATION

*Nature Kenya does not accept any responsibility whatsoever in respect of negligence of any of its staff, volunteers or members organising the outings/trips or for any loss, injury, death or damage to property.*

## MARCH DIARY

Sat 2	ASF Birdwalks
Mon 11	Talk on Fungi & LifeSense video
Sat 16	FONA AGM FFJ Birdwalk
Sun 17	Sunday Birdwatch
Mon 25	Tree Walk
Thu 28	Trip to Western Kenya
<i>Birdwalks every Wednesday Morning</i>	
<i>Bird ringing every Thursday Morning</i>	

Editor, Catherine Ngarachu

## Bird Hotline 749957

Please note the records below are unconfirmed

**BIRDS FOR BREAKFAST** Recently my wife Ann and I were lucky enough to visit Costa Rica to see a member of Nature Kenya, who now lives in the capital San Jose. We visited the Manteverde cloud forest, a wonderful waterfall garden with hummingbird feeders and a botanical garden. We saw two and three-toed sloths, Blue Jeans (poison) dart frogs (2.5 long), Emerald Basilisk (like a large iguana that can run on top of the water), Collared Peccary (like a large pig), Mexican red-legged tarantula and much more, plus nearly 180 species of birds, including 15 species of hummingbird.

On our way to luxuriate in some open air thermal baths near the Arenal volcano (still active and emitting smoke) we stopped for breakfast at Los Lavas Café at La Fortuna near the shores of Lake Arenal. As we ordered our bacon and eggs we noticed the bird tables in the garden alongside being charged with bananas. To our utter delight we were treated to a dazzling display of Costa Rican bird life as lifer after lifer came into view:

**Clay-colored Robin** (a drab brown bird, but the national bird of Costa Rica, the Resplendent Quetzal having been bagged by Nicaragua), **Red-legged Honeycreeper** (bright blue and black, and what red legs!), **Blue-gray Tanager**, **Yellow-throated Euphonia**, **Scarlet-rumped Tanager** (black with a brilliant scarlet rump), **Greyish Saltator**, **Northern Baltimore Oriole**, (black head and bright orange body), **Palm Tanager**, **Yellow Warbler**, **Bronze-tailed Hummingbird**, **Bananaquit**, **Great Kiskadee** (a large flycatcher), **Buff-throated Saltator**, and to top it all off the **Green Honeycreeper** (yellow decurved beak, black head and green body). And all this as we had breakfast! What a feast!

I did manage to see the **Resplendent Quetzal** (3 of them) on a later trip. What a sight!

By the way - a serious tip for anyone booking a flight to San Jose, Costa Rica: the destination can very easily be mistaken by your travel company who will route you to San Jose, CALIFORNIA. And I speak from bitter experience! *Chris Hill*

## ADVERTISE IN NATURE NET

Reach over **1000** members  
by advertising in **Nature Net**  
Rates for Classifieds: • Up to 25  
words 250/- • Up to 50 words 500/-  
• 1/4 page @ 1750/-  
• 1/2 page @ 3000/-

## NOTICES

### JOIN the African section of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB)

The section aims to be a pan-African conservation network. To join the Africa section you must be a member of the SCB ([www.conservationbiology.org](http://www.conservationbiology.org)) and then you can simply send a message to [africa@conservationbiology.org](mailto:africa@conservationbiology.org) stating your interest.

An email-based bulletin on Conservation Biology and Conservation Biology in Practice will be distributed.

## CLASSIFIEDS

### INDIGENOUS TREES

**INDIGENOUS TREES FOR ALL  
CLIMATIC TYPES AVAILABLE  
FROM ESTABLISHED  
NURSERY, 35 MINUTES FROM  
MUTHAIGA.**

**OVER 70 SPECIES READY  
FOR THE LONG RAINS, ALL  
WELL GROWN IN LARGE  
POLYPOTS AND READY TO  
PLANT.**

**TREES CAN BE DELIVERED  
TO NAIROBI  
LANDSCAPE SIZE TREES  
AND TREE PLANTING  
SERVICE ALSO AVAILABLE.**

**CONTACT CAROLE  
HEMMINGS 0151 47332  
EMAIL:  
[hemmings@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:hemmings@africaonline.co.ke)**



Aga Khan Junior Academy performers at the *Wind in the Trees* concert, organised by Friends of Nairobi Arboretum. 14 groups performed for hundreds of visitors.

## TRIPS & OUTINGS

### TO WESTERN KENYA MOUNTAINS, FOREST AND LAKE

Thursday 28 March - Wednesday 3 April '02

Mt. Elgon, Kakamega Forest, Lake Victoria

#### Change of Itinerary & cost

#### Day 1 Thursday 28 March

##### Nairobi - Mt Elgon

Meet at 7:15 for 7:30 a.m. departure from the National Museum carpark. Overnight at KWS Kapkuro Bandas. Depending on numbers we will share bathroom and kitchen facilities, while camping.

*Self catering so bring your own food & utensils as well as your own tent and bedding.*

#### Day 2 Friday 29 March Mt Elgon

#### Day 3 Saturday 30 March

##### Kakamega Forest

Morning in the northern part of the forest. Lunch at Isecheno (southern part) Guest House and Campsite (also overnight here).

#### Day 4 Sunday 31 March Kakamega Forest



#### Day 5 Monday 1 April

##### Kakamega Forest - Mbita Point

Depart after breakfast for Mbita Point. Afternoon birdwalk and overnight at Lake Victoria Safari Village.

#### Day 6 Tuesday 2 April B i r d Sanctuary, and if possible Ruma National Park

#### Day 7 Wednesday 3 April M b i t a Point - Nairobi

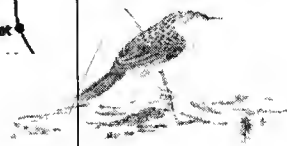
**Cost per person:** Ksh 12,000/- not inclusive of park fees and transport.

Bookings must be accompanied by a non-refundable deposit of half the trip cost (KSh 6,000/-). Balance must be paid in full by 8 March '02.

## REPORTING

### SITE SUPPORT GROUP (SSG) MEMBERS ACCOMPLISH SURVEY ON THE SHARPE'S LONGCLAW AND ABERDARE CISTICOLA

Kariuki  
Ndang'ang'a &  
Ronald Mulwa



From 15 - 24  
September 2001, a  
rapid survey of the

Mau Narok/Molo Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) was conducted to mainly assess the distribution and extent of the remaining grassland habitat and determine population densities of two endemic and threatened Kenyan birds: Sharpe's Longclaw and Aberdare Cisticola.

The six-man team included three National Museums Ornithology Dept. staff: Koriuki Ndang'ang'o, Ronald Mulwa Patrick Gichuki and three members of the SSG Friends of Kinangop Plateau (FoKP): James Njoroge, Andrew Mwangi and Pius Njoroge.

Preliminary results show that the approximate cover of grasslands is a third, and that of cultivated land is half, of the IBA. Larger and more continuous grasslands were found on the southernmost part of the IBA, which is occupied by the mainly pastoral Maasai community. Sharpe's Longclaw occurred in densities of approximately 1 bird per hectare. Aberdare Cisticola was only seen in 3 of the 40 sample survey plots. Jackson's Widowbird was quite common and readily consoled the team where the other two lacked. There were over 60 other species recorded on the grasslands.

During the survey the group made contacts with schools and individuals in the area to raise awareness on the conservation of birds and biodiversity in general. This survey was also training for the FoKP members and it was an inspiration to the local people towards forming Site Support Groups similar to the FoKP in this area.

This expedition was funded by the African Bird Club (ABC) through Nature Kenya.

#### *Barn Owl story continued*

Blinking in the torch's light, she squints her disapproval at me. I switch off the torch. At first, it seems a hood has been thrown over my head. Gradually, straining the 100 million add rods in my retinas, I am able to just barely discern the shadows of shapes around me. The owl fluffs her feathers and flexes her wings. She has detected something in the bushes below. With focused concentration, she watches and listens. Sounds, for too faint for human hearing, are as clear to her as if shouted through a microphone. She silently thrusts herself from the fig tree into the darkness below. Her prey, a shrew, now alerted to the threat, flees in a zig-zag scramble. The owl, homing like a heat-seeking missile, follows every movement the shrew makes. Her flight is noiseless. Aligning her talons in perfect synchrony with the fleeing shrew, she crashes through an opening in the thorny twigs. I hear a deadly crunch. The owl emerges from the bushes and returns, bearing her meal, to the fig tree.

Amazed at her hunting skills, I watch her eat. Her black eyes glower at me from the pearly-white, heart-shaped face. It is this very face, eerily

beautiful, that allows her to hunt so efficiently in utter darkness. The two sculpted fans of fine, filamentous feathers capture, channel and feed sounds directly into the two depressions formed by the whorl of feathers beneath the owl's eyes, alongside her beak. From these depressions, the focused sound is channelled into ear-holes. The sound waves that were captured by the wide satellite-dish of the owl's face are concentrated and therefore amplified.

The owl eats in gulps, constantly turning her head—scanning and interpreting sounds. Her head-turning reveals how her sense of hearing is even more finely adapted. She is able to track movement and adjust her own trajectory because each ear is differentially positioned. The right ear is higher, with the whorl tilted to capture sounds from above, while the left ear, with the whorl of feathers tilted downwards, receives sounds from below. Her brain, receiving the two sets of sound information simultaneously, can create a three-dimensional tracking system that is virtually infallible, literally creating a picture out of sound. Given this high-tech system, nocturnal shrews and rodents don't stand a chance!